

# KAMMA

By

BHIKKHU SILACARA



INDIA BODHI SOCIETY OF INDIA  
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# KAMMA

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In its simplest form, expressed in the simplest words, the Buddhist doctrine of Kamma can be readily understood by the smallest child. For it says to that child: "Be good and you will be happy, now and in the future. But if you are bad, you will be unhappy, now and in the future. The world is made like that." And if the child should ask, as children will, "Why is the world made like that?" the only correct answer on the part of the adult asked will be: "I do not know why it is made like that. I also do not know why water is wet, or why fire is hot. They just are so, as you will find out for yourself when you try them, and see. And the world also is made like that, as you will find out as you go on living and getting older, that is, when you try *it* and see." However, the adult himself will wish to know a little more about what this law of the world,—of all worlds,—means, and how it works, than is expressed in this bald statement to the child in years and understanding. And when he makes enquiry into that law, as expounded by the Buddha, he finds that in the

details of its nature and working, it has unexpected ramifications which require some attention and study fully to understand. And even then, with all the study that may be given to it, it can never as a whole be fully understood by the mind of ordinary men. Only a Buddha is possessed of the mental calibre sufficient to grasp to the full the whole sequence of causation which brings about a given state of affairs in the life of any being, at any given point of time. For anyone else to attempt to plumb all these depths of causation—it is the Buddha himself who gives the warning—would be to run grave risk of mental alienation, in plain English, of madness, at the very least, temporary, and it might even be, permanent. This, however, need not deter us from trying to understand to the best of our ability, all that *can* be understood by minds such as ours. So to this task let us now address ourselves.

And first we must note what a great misfortune it is, from our Buddhist point of view, that the earlier introducers of this word, Kamma, under its Sanskrit form Karma, into the vocabulary of the western world, were not Buddhists, and consequently stamped upon the word a meaning, in the average westerner's mind, which is altogether different from the meaning it has for us who have learned the Buddha's doctrine at its original sources. The greatest offenders in this regard

have been the representatives of an alien faith who went out into Eastern countries to propagate that faith of theirs. For, in the course of their efforts to pick up the language of the lands to which they had been sent, in their talk with the dwellers in these lands, they frequently heard the expression, when such were talking of something that had happened to them (generally of an untoward nature): "O, it is my karma ; it is my karma," and forthwith jumped to the conclusion that what their Oriental acquaintances were saying was: "Oh, this is my fate ; this is my destiny. This is something imposed on me by a power beyond my control, to which I must helplessly submit." And they mentally noted down that among the other lamentable evils prevalent among those unfortunate Orientals this also was one: that they were fatalists, people who believed that their fate in life was all fixed in advance beforehand, and that nothing now that they might do, could alter it.

What excuse or grounds had these missionaries for jumping to this conclusion? Only this: that already in their own continent some such similar ideas were at one time widely held by their own fellow-religionists, and championed and propagated by several of the most outstanding and able men in the history of their own religion! There was, for instance, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, who in his book, "De

Necessitate," proved with irrefragable logic that everything that happened in the process of nature, did so in strict dependence upon an antecedent cause ; and left no loophole for the possibility of any change in a "sinner's" career save the intervention of what he called "grace," which again could intervene, and did intervene, only according to the good will and pleasure of "God". Thus the "sinner" remained in a perfectly hopeless position, unless and until it should happen that "God" was pleased to bestow on him "grace".

Then there was John Calvin, of Geneva, a member, and a leading member, of the reformed Christian church, as Bishop Augustine was of the unreformed church, who also with perfect logical consistency proved from passages in the Christian's "holy book" that some persons by divine decree were foreordained to be saved from eternal suffering, and others equally foreordained to suffer cruel torment through all eternity by the decree of the same god, and neither the one class nor the other, whatever they might do or not do, could avoid the destiny allotted to them in advance before ever they were born, by their god.

And finally, there was Jonathan Edwards, of Boston, U.S.A., also an eminent preacher in the reformed Christian church of his country, who, from

the dogma of the fore-knowledge of the god who made the world and all in it, men included, deduced with clear and incontrovertible logic, that since all that was going to happen was already known to this god, then it had as good as already happened in his mind ; and any idea human beings might entertain that they were making things happen, according to their own wills, in one way or another, was pure illusion. Their efforts to make things happen were themselves already known in advance by the god, thus, they were not free efforts, but already ordained to happen, together with all their results.

With these ideas concerning the necessitated, predestined, foreknown nature of human action preached in their day by these three eminent worthies of the Christian church, floating about in their minds, it was little wonder that the first Christian missionaries to Indian and Indian-influenced lands, supposed that in the teaching of Karma or Kamma, they had merely lighted on an Oriental form of this belief of some of their own eminent co-religionists. Yet, despite the close resemblance in *form* to their own ideas which they thought they had discerned, it was an entirely erroneous idea of the *substance* of this Oriental saying, "It is my karma", at which these Christian missionaries arrived.

The word Karma, or in its Pali form, Kamma,

is the substantive derived from the verb *karoti*, to do, to make, to perform ; it is this, and absolutely nothing else whatsoever. So that, when an Oriental, whether Buddhist or Hindu, says: "This is my Karma or Kamma," all he is saying is: "This is my action ; this is my doing ; this is my deed. It is not somebody else's doing ; it is not somebody else's deed. It is not a god's doing, not a decree of necessity, or predestination, or foreknowledge. I did this myself." Thus, when they said: "This is my Kamma or doing," they were saying the *very opposite* of what the Christian missioner, with his ideas of predestination and foreordination and foreknowledge, thought they were saying. They were asserting their own power of making their destiny ; and all the time they were asserting this, the missioner thought they were asserting the power of something else to make that destiny what *it* chose despite all that the human being might struggle and strive to effect!

Again, what excuse had the missioner for such a terrific misunderstanding, such a complete misapprehension of the phrase he heard, that he took it to mean the exact opposite of what it did mean? The answer must be, as was Dr. Johnson's on a celebrated occasion: "Ignorance, madam! sheer ignorance!" For the men who go out to these Eastern lands to try to win adherents to the nominal

religion of their own land are not usually of any great knowledge. Only too often they have little else in their heads but the petty little stock of ideas that have been planted there in the petty little missionary colleges and training schools in which they have spent several years getting ready, as well as may be, to attack and overwhelm the supposed false views and ideas of the “heathen” once they come face to face with them. And so trained, so taught, and knowing hardly anything else about the movement of ideas current at different epochs in their own quarter of the globe, they were ignorant of the idea of *re-birth*, of *re-embodiment*, of the *repeated* manifestation at separate intervals in the visible world, of the same stream or line of human causation. Never having heard of anything else in their schools and colleges, they have entertained the naïve idea that when a human being is born anywhere into our world, this is a wholly and completely new creation of mind, of character, of the entire psychic make-up which constitutes that being. So that when an Oriental of the Hindu or Buddhist religion, said in their hearing: “This is my action,” they did not reflect that one of the great chiefs of their own religion in its early days, to wit, Origen, on the authority of the holy book of that religion—“Did this man sin . . . that he was *born* blind?”—had believed in the possibility of men

committing evil before they were born into their present life, and therefore of reaping the result of that evil doing now that they are born,—they never reflected on this, and indeed, *could* not reflect on it, never having been taught that such an idea once had currency in the early days of their religion, and so they never had any possibility of understanding this teaching about Kamma.

For the idea of Kamma or Karma is intimately bound up with that of re-birth. In a sense it may be said to be part of it. One might even say, with perfect correctness, that they are the same doctrine, looked at, in one case subjectively, and in the other, objectively. In a manner of speaking, Kamma is re-birth, latent and, for the time being, unmanifest; and re-birth is Kamma become active and manifest. Kamma is like a cable running unseen under the surface of a sea, and every now and again emerging above the surface of that sea and exposing to view a small portion of its length, making its appearance known to our human vision, manifesting itself to our physical sight. Each of such emergencies is what we call a “lifetime,” only because we have no other better word for it. But in strict truth, the real “lifetime” is the stretch of the cable’s whole length both beneath and above the surface of our supposed sea, both when manifest and visible, and when unmanifest

and invisible, to human perception. And the end, the completion of *the cable of Kamma*, and not the mere termination of one of the manifestations of a portion of the Kamma-cable we usually call a "lifetime," not that mere lapse into non-manifestation of the Kamma-cable which in current phrase we name "death". To borrow a little of the language of physics, we might say that Kamma is energy, that special form of energy which makes, or rather is, a living being. And the body through which that energy manifests itself when such a being is as we say, "born", is the particular collection of matter through which that energy makes its presence known in the physical world, energies being known to us here only in association with some form or other of matter, not otherwise.

When or why did this energy begin to run its course, entailing all that is involved in that course, for sentient beings, of sorrow and gladness, pain and pleasure, of the undesirable and of the desirable,—entailing, in short, all that is involved in the history of a universe? Useless to ask! Who knows? Who can know? To ponder, with intent to find an answer, too deeply and long upon such questions, were to invite the breakdown of the brain that so pondered. "The beginning of beings is not to be perceived", says a Buddhist Scripture. All we know is that the *ending*

of Kamma, of beings that suffer, may be achieved ; all the teaching of all the Buddhas being nothing else but the pointing out of the Way to that ending. Leaving aside, then, this question regarding the beginning of Kamma as profitless alike to ask and answer, we may now turn to what is of more practical use in the life we now live ; we may turn to the consideration of some of the details of the working of this law of the continuity of energy in the field of the life of conscious beings.

The first thing we have to note about Kamma is that real, effective Kamma, the sort of Kamma which runs on from lifetime to lifetime, is *mental* Kamma, is volition. "Kamma is volition, I declare", is one of the Buddha's sayings. Action of the body or of speech in which there is no volition, no intention involved, such action is not Kamma in the effective sense of the word ; it does not involve any serious long-lasting fruit or result. It was on this point that the Buddha differed in his teaching about Kamma from the sect of "naked ascetics" as they were called in his day, who to-day are known as Jains. They held that every act whatsoever, even the most accidental and unintentional, produced full fruit ; and so when they drank water or went walking anywhere, they took great precautions to see that in performing these most ordinary acts, they did not

take any life, even in the humblest form. They drank all their water through a sieve of fine mesh, and carefully brushed the path on which they were walking, before taking each step thereon. But the Buddha, in argument with them, as recorded in the Upali Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya, proved to them that as regards ultimate effect, such meticulous care about externals was not nearly so necessary as it was to cleanse the *mind* of all tendency to hurt and harm. It was *mental* action that involved real Kamma-vipaka, real Kamma-result. The rest, though also important and to be observed, was yet only second in importance to this mental Kamma.

The next thing we have to note about Kamma is that it is not such a simple matter as in ordinary popular exposition it is frequently made out to be. In expounding Kamma and its consequences, action and its fruit, by way of illustration, use is sometimes made of the simile of an electric current. Kamma is said to be like a current of electricity running along a wire, and in its course flowing through the filament in an electric bulb-lamp, and manifesting itself, showing its presence, as light, as illumination. When the lamp is broken, or wears out, and the light therefore is extinguished, this does not mean that the current of electricity has ceased to exist, so it is said : it only means that its method of manifestation for

the time being has been denied to it, taken away from it, but that the current is still in existence, and only waiting for a fresh means of manifestation to be provided, whatever this may be (another bulb-lamp, or an electric heater, or an electric motor), when it will again show itself as light, or heat, or motive energy, as the case may be. The electric current, in this illustration, represents the line or flow of Kamma ; and the bulb-lamp, or heater, or motor, stand for the various "life-times" of an individual in this world of visible things.

Now this illustration will do well enough as a first rough illustration of the Buddhist doctrine of Kamma, for those who have never heard of it before, for at least it does one thing effectively ; it shows the difference between Kamma as expounded outside Buddhism, and as it is expounded inside our Religion. Outside, Kamma is regarded as something made by an individual. But this illustration of it as an electric current shows that the current, that is the Kamma, is the individual. The so-called individual is only the manifestation of Kamma, its "visibilisation", its making manifest, just as the light in an electric bulb-light is only the making visible and manifest of the presence of the electric current. So far the illustration is quite correct. It only is defective in this point, that it makes out the current of Kamma to be a

simple, homogeneous thing such as is an electric current, whereas in reality the current of Kamma of which each living being is the present temporary manifestation is a highly complicated and complex thing. It is not a simple homogeneous line of energy, but rather a broad stream containing in its flow a number of simultaneously running currents of widely different character; at least, this is so, so far as is concerned the ordinary normal man of every day, such men as you or I.

Or, perhaps, just for the sake of clearness, we had best first regard it, not as a single thin thread but as a thick cable made up of a great number of thin threads, each of these threads having a different colour, being of a different character. Thus the cable is not of one colour, whether black or white or red or green or any other colour, but is made up of, and to anyone who could see it with the physical eye, would present the appearance of, a highly speckled, variegated coil, of every variety of colour. In other words, the Kamma each of ordinary men has behind him, the line of Kamma of which each of us is the present manifestation, is a complex of many different mental impulsions, some good, some bad, some neither one nor the other, some happy, some unhappy, some merely indifferent, some beautiful, some ugly, some just "plain Jane". And of all this complex, lying in

our background, what is manifest to-day as you and I, is just a little bit of one or two of these vari-coloured threads in the thick cable ; the remainder of the threads in the cable have not yet shown themselves to the light of day in actual life in this world.

For, still pursuing our metaphor of the cable made up of many threads of various colours, this cable is to be thought of as running along beneath the surface of a sea, where it is not seen by our eyes. Every little while it emerges above the surface of this supposed sea, and for a brief while shows a portion of its length, nay, only a small portion of that portion, just a few threads of may be one or two of the colours that make up its girth ; and then, it sinks under the surface of the sea again, and becomes invisible to us. Each such emergence of the cable out of invisibility into visibility is what we call a living being's lifetime ; and thus it is the making visible and seen, not the whole of the cable, but only a few threads in the composition of the cable. In other words, dropping all metaphor : The lifetime of any being is not a full manifestation of all the Kamma that makes that being, but is only a manifestation of a very small part of that Kamma. Much, very much, of a very mixed kind in us ordinary people, still remains to be manifested at some future time ; and will manifest itself, if in the meantime, by

our present action, by the Kamma we are now making, some of these threads are not changed in their character and composition, or—as is *possible*, but not very probable in the case of ordinary men—completely cut out, extirpated, by our present action, our present Kamma, or by some future action or Kamma of ours.

This is the explanation of that phenomenon in human life frequently observed by those who have lived long enough to see and note something of the ways of themselves and their fellowmen—the doing of a deed by a man which takes us by complete surprise, so utterly, so unexpectedly inconsistent with his character does it seem to us, so unlike what we should ever have expected a man like him to do, as we say ; nay, sometimes it is the doing of a deed of evil sort, by ourselves, of which we had not believed ourselves capable! “There is no fathoming the depths of the human heart,” is a frequent saying on the lips of our moralists of the West. Put more Buddhistically,—and that means, more accurately, more scientifically—this saying would run: “There is no telling what kind of Kamma lies at the back of any man, ourselves included, which may come forward and make itself manifest at any time.” “We are fearfully and wonderfully made”, says another passage from one of the religious Scriptures.

of the World. It is quite true. Our past Kamma is a fearful and wonderful mixture ; and we never can tell which part of that mixture, or bad or good, or dark or bright, given propitious, favouring circumstances, is not going to come to the surface and reveal its existence in open, outward word and act.

It is the consideration of this fact of the very mixed nature of the Kamma lying behind each human being which inspires us Buddhists to an attitude of *caritas*, of “charity” towards our fellow-men, even the so-called worst of them, the evil-doing man, the criminal. Indeed, we cannot help having such an attitude : we are compelled to it when we reflect that, for all we know, in us too, in the background, may lurk just such evil Kammavipaka, fruit of action from our past, which may at any time when circumstances favour, come into the foreground, and then we too, may find ourselves borne almost helplessly along by that undesirable impulsion into the corresponding act that will stamp us in the eyes of others as a criminal. More than that, for all we know, there may lie in the background of the evil-doer who is so despised and rejected by those who know nothing of the possibilities of Kammavipaka behind each man,—there may lie in his background some brilliant threads of the finest, whitest texture, some good Kamma of a quality we who

think we have the right to despise him, will have a great deal to do before we acquire anything like it. When the present evil Kamma of the criminal is worked out and finished with, how do we know what good Kamma of his from his past may then come into effect and make of him in the world's eyes a good man in the highest degree, perhaps even a saint? Such things have happened. Men of notoriously evil lives have turned round and become saints, like that Augustine, who in his wild youth, was well-nigh the breaker of his pious mother's heart, and yet later in life, became one of the pillars of the Church which he joined. But even on a lesser scale, there is hardly any of us who does not know of some instance in our experience of men who have completely changed their character as it seemed, and turned from evil to good. Yet, as a matter of fact, they have not changed their character at all. What has happened is only that one black line of cause and effect in that Kamma which was the man's character, one dark thread in the cable of Kamma, has run its course, come to an end, and now another and brighter and better one takes up the running in the visible outward manifestation of the man's life. And as it has been with him, so it may be with us. We are none of us, even so-called good men, so good as we think we are, or as our fellows think we are.

Neither are any of us, even the so-called bad, so bad as their contemning fellows think they are. We are none of us all white or all black. The vast majority of men are just piebald, white in spots and black in spots! Hence there is no call for anything but forbearance for the evil-doer of the moment; for pitying charity towards his unlovely ways, since, for ought we know, they may any time,—if not in this lifetime, then in another,—turn and change to good and lovely ways.

In another regard, the stream or cable of Kamma is more complicated than in the simile of the electric current it is represented to be. In that simile, it is represented as running straightforward from one lifetime to the next. But this is not what actually happens. The actions, the Kamma, of this life in general, do not give rise to their appropriate results, their due fruit, *in the immediately succeeding life*; but those results, that fruit, are reaped, come to fruition, in any subsequent life, *after* the next lifetime. The only part of the Kamma of this lifetime of any man which bears its fruit in the immediately following lifetime is the last thought which he has at the moment of death. This thought, of whatever nature it may be, bad or good, sad or glad, gloomy or bright, decides the character of the immediately following lifetime.

Hence the great, the serious importance of the thought which may be occupying a man's mind when he is on the point of death. Hence the duty laid upon all who have to be present at the death of any fellow being, to encourage him in every way possible, to think only good, happy, wholesome thoughts as his death hour approaches. And this, as a matter of fact, is what is done at every Buddhist death-bed. All friends and relatives who are about the dying person try to keep his mind directed upon everything of a comforting and happifying nature. They advise him to think of all the good things he has done to others, of all the good that others have done to him ; to think of the good that has been done both to the world and to himself by the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha ; and to pass away happy in the knowledge that he has put his trust in these three good things, these three precious treasures. If they can succeed in doing this, then they feel confident that they have done their departing brother-man the greatest service at the last that they could do him ; they have ensured him a happy and favourable immediately following lifetime. Of all that he has done of evil, in the past, he is exhorted to repent and then forget, put behind him, think no more of. For if he were to dwell upon that evil, so that that evil were the last thought in his mind on

deceasing, then an evil following birth would be the result.

Here we see of what benefit, odd as it may sound from a strictly rationalistic standpoint, is a "death-bed repentance", when such a thing can truly be brought about. It makes it possible for the dying man to have a good thought in his mind as he passes out of this life into his next. Yet let no man deceive himself and imagine that because this may possibly be brought about, all may be well with him for his next life, after he has lived a life-time filled full of evil living. For it is by no means certain that even the presence of all the helping relatives one has about one on one's death-bed, will be able to counteract the Kamma, the result of a lifetime spent in evil thought and deeds. "The ruling passion strong in death" is not a mere pretty saying: it is a serious fact. If a man has spent a lifetime in say, acting the miser, thinking gold, talking gold, working only for gold, when his last hour and moment comes, he is only too likely to carry on even then the thoughts and desires by which he has been dominated all his life, in spite of what all about him may be trying to do to turn his mind and thoughts in worthier directions. The accumulated thought of all his life-time may be too strong despite all his friends are trying to do for him, and may still persist

in his mind, keeping out everything else, and so there may lie before him only another sordid life-time given over to his pitiful lust for filthy lucre and all the mean ways of getting possession of it which have characterised his life-time that is drawing to a close. For all that that mis-spent life-time has done for him, he is no whit nearer to the goal of the Good.

Or if a man has been a lifelong drunkard, living only for the stimulation, the excitation, the exhilaration which alcohol taken into the body gives, then how hard it will be for him, at his dying hour, as he feels his powers waning, his life ebbing away from him, to help craving, craving with all his might, for another draught of the liquor to which he has looked all his past life-time for the revival of his powers, the imparting of a sense of well-being! It will be almost impossible for him, notwithstanding what all his friends round him may be trying to do, to turn his mind in happier directions; and so he will be only too likely to die with a last craving thought of liquor in his mind, and so prepare for himself another drink-sodden career in a new body.

For the point here is, that in the absence of any other force powerful enough to over-master it, the last thought of a dying man is most likely to be that by which he has been most dominated all his life.

His last thought is likely to be that which he was most in the habit of cherishing during his life. Thus, though technically, the last dying thought of a man determines his immediately following life, actually in most cases, it is the dominant thought of his whole life-time which determines his next birth, save and except in those cases where by one means or other a "death-bed repentance" is brought about, or good friends surrounding his dying couch, are able to turn his thoughts away out of the channel they have followed all through his life, and are able to direct them into good and happy directions, leading thereby to a good and happy immediately following birth.

It was said above that the only thought-Kamma which is effective in fruit, in result, in the lifetime immediately following that in which it is "made", is the last dying thought of the deceasing person, and that this last thought, in the absence of any more powerful Kamma generated at the time under the instigation of kind friends or other ministrants about the death-bed, will be the thought which was most predominant throughout the person's life. What, then, of all the other thought-Kamma generated by a person during his life? What of all the other countless mental impulsions set going by a person throughout his lifetime in addition to the one most prevailing? Are these of no account? Are they

without fruit? Do they entail no result? By no means. There is indeed a class of thought which bears no fruit, entails no result, if it be not immediately given the opportunity to bear fruit, produce result. It is, as it were, not full-grown thought; it is thought only in its initial stage, which has gone no further than the first faint stirrings of volition. This is the only kind of mental Kamma, thought-action which entails no consequences in the future, if it has no consequences immediately following in this life-time, then it has no consequences at all. It is dead Kamma. By a figure of speech one might say that it is Kamma which has never properly been alive. But all the rest of a person's mental Kamma must produce effects in the future, does not die out and perish without result, but waits, gathers together, accumulates, till a suitable occasion for its working out arrives in some future lifetime, any future life-time, after the immediately following one. It is as it were, a great storehouse, out of which may be drawn at any time in the future after the next life-time, treasures of gleaming gold and of precious stones, or unlovely heaps of foul dross and rubbish, or worse still, of noxious poisons to infect the whole of the lifetime in which they appear. Always behind each of us ordinary folk who are yet a long way from the *summum bonum*—the clearing up and cancelling

of all the accounts of Kamma—there lies this heaped-up mass of Kamma of the past, all waiting its due turn to come forward and ripen into active, actual effects in this or in some future lifetime.

But these effects, that fruit, is not all settled and fixed to its smallest detail, in advance, like some fate or doom. There is nothing settled and fixed and frozen into immobile rigidity, in the universe as it is envisaged by the Buddha. It is all mobile, flowing, fluid, changing; and therefore at all times, at any moment, to be changed and modified and given new shape in some degree, however small. Kamma is never something settled and done with; it is always something that is happening now, and by its happening now, influencing and modifying and changing the results of the Kamma of the past.

Kamma, in short, is not altogether a cable made up of a great number of threads whose colours are fixed, and therefore remain as they are all through the length of the cable. It must rather be thought of as a cable made up of threads of various colours, which threads themselves are changing their colours through the influence upon them of the threads that run alongside them. Or perhaps it will be better to drop the simile of the cable altogether, as being too static a thing to represent the mobile, changing flow of Kamma, and to imagine Kamma as a stream of

water, or rather of many-coloured waters running in currents alongside one another in the main bed of the stream, and continually imparting some of their own colouring to the neighbouring currents, and from these neighbouring currents receiving in return some colouring that changes their own character, while all the time also, new bodies of coloured water are being added to the stream, and strengthening, intensifying whatever current of its own colour is already part of the stream.

For this is exactly how Kamma is continually working. Past Kamma, past action; is continually being modified in its present results by present action, present Kamma. And also, present Kamma in its results is continually being modified and altered by past Kamma.

To simplify matters, let us suppose the stream of Kamma representing a given living being to be composed just of two currents, one of white and one of dark water. If now, that being by his present thought-action, his present mental Kamma, pours some white water into the stream, he has thereby made the effect of any blackness that may have flowed down from the past, a little less black. He has influenced the effects of past Kamma. But *how much*, he makes it less black, depends upon *how much* of blackness has come down from the past. If

the volume of black water from the past is very great, then what white water he has added to the stream, will make only a little difference in its blackness. But if the volume of black water from the past is only a small one, then the white water now added will make a great difference in the general whitening of the stream. The Kamma of the past is influencing and modifying the Kamma-vipäka, the Kamma-fruit of the present, either in one direction or another.

Thus, at every moment our lives are in our own hands to mould afresh in whatever direction we wish to mould them. The past is not unchangeable and fixed. We can change it now by our present action. Still less is our future inevitably fixed and settled by reason of our present action, our present Kamma. When that future comes, then as now, we can again pour into the stream of our Kamma fresh water, good or bad, clear and white or muddy and dark, and make it one way or the other, as we ourselves shall determine, and no other.

This present Kamma by which we weaken or intensify past Kamma in its results, is what is called technically, *supportive* Kamma ; and it is this which furnishes the opportunity for, and calls forth into activity the various portions, good or bad, bright or dark, of our accumulated Kamma of the past. Our present Kamma, our action of to-day, may furnish

“support” either for the good or the bad that may lie in our past, and thus bring to present powerful fruition the one or the other, according as we shall ourselves choose. If we are so strong in the making of good Kamma as to heap up a great quantity of good, there is even the possibility, not only of *modifying* past bad Kamma but even of *wiping it out* altogether, of completely cancelling it. But this is a tremendous thing to do, even though it *can* be done by one sufficiently strong. For most of us, the best we can hope is by diligent attention to create such a standing stock of good Kamma as will powerfully modify the effect of our past bad Kamma, and reduce its baneful power to a minimum. But the powerful Kamma generated by an Arahan, or by one on the Higher Eightfold Path, the Kamma generated by the practising of the Jhanas and the deeper meditations, can and does obliterate all the past bad Kamma of the practiser of these mighty exercises, and so he is quit of his life’s sum ; he has solved it ; he has Nibbana. It follows that this wiping out of his account of all his past bad Kamma, takes place in the last lifetime of the Arahan.

It should now be clear that a human being *is* not anything but is always *becoming* something ; and that something which he is becoming depends entirely on his own action, his own Kamma, and on

nothing else. Thus his fate is entirely of his own making. It is never fixed. At any, at every moment, we may each begin to change it for the better, if it has been bad. Also, alas! we may, if we are not always on guard, always practising heedfulness, Sati —also we may at any moment begin to change it for the worse. “Thou good man,” says Dr. Paul Dahlke, in a striking passage in his *Buddhismus als Religion und Moral*, “Thou ‘good man,’ be not overproud in thy ‘goodness’. Thou *art* not good; thou only *becomest* good in so far as thou dost not permit thyself to become evil, in so far as thou strivest after goodness. ‘The heritage which the fathers have earned and passed on to the sons, these sons can only inherit on condition that they earn it anew for themselves each new day,’ as Goethe says. And thou ‘bad man’, be not despairing in thy ‘badness’. Thou *art* not bad; thou only *becomest* bad in so far as thou dost not strive after goodness. But now, now, this very minute, thou mayest turn; thou mayest begin to become good.”

This is so. At every moment we may, nay, at every moment, whether we want to or not, we *are* making additions to our stream of Kamma of good or bad, and so turning it in one direction or the other by some slight degree which, if we permit it, will go on increasing until we have a powerful mass of

habitual Kamma of the one kind or the other, which will produce correspondingly powerful effects in our whole life. It is this “habitual Kamma” as it is technically called, to which we ordinary people must look for our salvation, as it were, from past evil Kamma. The Arahan only can make the powerful Kamma by a few acts which will wipe out his evil from the past : but we can produce something not quite so strong to efface past evil, but still extremely powerful in that direction, by a *habitual* cultivation of good states of mind, day by day.

It is always a good thing, and will, if persisted in, even though no good effects are immediately seen, produce very great results eventually, if every day we devote some time to thinking good thoughts, thoughts of kindness and good-will to all, of sympathy with all that are afflicted, of a fellow-feeling of happiness with all that are enjoying happiness, and of equanimity and even-mindedness towards whatever may befall ourselves, so long as others are obtaining happiness and comfort, a state of mind in which envy and jealousy is impossible. To practise these Brahma-vihāras, as they are called, these “lofty or divine dwellings” of the mind, is to make very good Kamma which may have very great effect in the future if not in this present life, in turning our lives to happy issues. Of course, besides this mental practice, the true

Buddhist will not neglect the actual practice of Däna, of giving to those who need, as far as his means will allow him, and of abstaining from doing wrong to anyone in the directions indicated in the Five Precepts to refrain from taking life, from theft, from unchastity, from evil speech, and from intoxicating liquor. All these things, mounting up, as they are steadily pursued and practised, make that accumulated habitual Kamma which will stand us all in good stead in whatever future lies before us. Indeed, it is all that will stand us in good stead. We have no other helper but our good deed ; no other condemner but our own evil deed. We have no one to fear but ourselves. No evil demon whatever can do lasting hurt or harm to the man of uprightness. He can afford to be fearless ; for there is nothing of which he need be afraid. His deeds are his strong protector ; he can have none stronger.

Thus it is in this world that men make their destinies, and make them themselves. "Here and now, is the whole fact", as the American seer Emerson once said. Here and now, according to this doctrine of Kamma taught by the Buddha, we are making our own heavens and our own hells, for there are no others but those we make for ourselves. No god can plant us in the one, and no devil despatch us to the other, apart from our own deed. It is this world, or

nothing, for us. Hence the foolishness of those who despise life in this world ; or, in a fit of madness, so hate it, as to throw it away in the act of the suicide. Life here is not despicable, is not hateful. It is our only chance of making good Kamma to counter-balance any evil Kamma we may happen to have made in the past, or at the very least, modify its evil effects. It is our sole opportunity of making good Kamma which, flowing down into the future may mount up and at length wipe out all our evil Kamma either of past or future doing, and so bring us to Nibbana's threshold. Hence a suicide is doing the foolishest thing any man can do. He is cutting off from himself the one most important benefit to be derived from the privilege of having been born a man, he is depriving himself, for the time being, of the opportunity of making any good Kamma. Suicide is not "sinful", as ecclesiastics say, it is silly. It is not a "crime", as some legalitarians say ; it is a blunder. It is a silliness, a blunder, of the worst kind, inasmuch as it is a negation of the whole purpose of life for each man born.

It is also so useless. It fails to produce what the foolish person who resorts to it, supposes it will produce,—release from some unhappy, miserable state of things in which he finds himself involved.

Since a man's last dying thought is that which

colours his immediately succeeding lifetime, and the suicide's last dying thought, by the very fact that it is a suicide's, is a thought of misery and unhappiness, his next lifetime, that immediately following, will be a life of misery and unhappiness also. So the suicide achieves nothing whatever of what he intended by his foolish deed. He is still where he was before he committed his rash act, still involved in the same tangle of unhappiness. He is much in the position of some schoolboy who has been given a difficult sum to solve on his slate, and in despair of solving it, smashes the slate on which it is written. The slate indeed is smashed, but the sum that was written on it still remains unsolved by the boy ; and he only has it given him to solve on a fresh slate, the same old sum, with an extra punishment added, mayhap, for his fault in breaking his last slate. Much better to have kept the old slate unsmashed, and done one's best to work out the solution there, since worked out it must be on some slate or other, before each scholar in life's school may pass on to the next higher problem and its solution.

There are a number of people in this wonderful world of ours who are so unfortunate as to be required by the nature of their profession, to find evil or what they suppose to be evil, in every form of religion but their own, and to rejoice over this rather

than over the finding of good. One finds a plentiful quantity of them scattered all over the lands of the East, but they seem inclined to gather most thickly, like a plague of locusts, wherever things are pleasant, wherever soft breezes blow, laden with spicy odours, and every prospect pleases, as in Ceylon, for instance. Such people, as they move about the streets of the city where they live and do their peculiar kind of work, from time to time hear the deep boom of a bell, struck with a deer horn, from the platform of one of the pagodas in the city, and as they hear, nod to themselves with a superior smile and mutter: "Ah, some of our good Buddhist friends have done another good deed, and are calling the attention of the gods to it to make sure they don't forget to chalk it up to their credit in the account books of Kamma." And in the course of talk with these "good Buddhist friends" and others, they will bring forward the charge: "O, Buddhists are far too selfish. They think about nothing else but their own Kamma. They are always trying to make more 'merit' for themselves. That's all they care for: something for themselves."

Being compelled as just said, by the nature of their profession to find all the unpleasant things they can in all other religions but their own, and to overlook and ignore, or if they cannot do that altogether,

at least to disparge and make light of anything pleasant they may find in such religions, such people, to some extent may be pardoned for the false idea they here have conceived of the working of Kamma, namely, as an affair that has solely to do with a man's own self. For it *is* a false idea which they, and others akin to them, have formed of Kamma in this regard.

To begin with: When, after having performed some work of merit on the platform of the pagoda, such as providing some Bhikkhus with a meal, or offering flowers or candles before some image of the Buddha, or reciting invocations to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, a Buddhist strikes the great bell on the pagoda-platform with the deer-horn which lies beside it for that purpose, he is *not* calling the attention of any supposed keeper of the records of Kamma to another item which is to be set down in his books to the credit of the person who has struck the bell. What he is saying is this: "All ye to whose ears comes the sound of this bell, know that a deed of merit has just been performed upon the platform of this pagoda. The doer of the deed hereby gladly offers you a share of his merit from the doing of the good deed, and begs you with equal gladness to accept of the same."

That is what the bell-beating on pagoda platforms in Buddhist countries means ; for besides Kamma, there is Patikamma, as it is called in the Pali. Besides Kamma pertaining, or adhering, to the so-called individual, there is such a thing—and it is constantly being practised—as sharing one's merit with others, transferring it, or part of it, to other individuals. Many are the touching, and sometimes amusing, little stories one hears in the East of people undergoing voluntary renunciation of pleasures of one kind and another, so that the "merit" of so doing may go to some loved one and assist him or her through some dangerous illness or other misfortune of which there are so many to be met with in this life of ours. For the thread of Kamma which is any given individual's, is, after all, not an isolated thread running a lonely course through empty space, but a thread which all the time is running out and in with other threads, is being worked into, interwoven, with these other neighbouring threads into a single fabric which makes, indeed, *is*, the world. Each individual's Kamma is running alongside of, and interworking itself with the threads of the Kamma of other individuals in his family, his city, his nation, his race, his world.

Even though he may not deliberately will and intend that his 'merit' shall be 'transferred' to another

in any given cases, if he is a powerful personality, one of the great ones of the earth, his merit, as also his demerit, transfers itself to others in his neighbourhood, and beyond. It "overflows," as the technical expression puts it, and if powerful enough, may considerably affect the Kamma of countless persons the individual never saw or was ever likely to see. Instances of this particular kind of "overflow" Kamma are found in the careers of the great "conquerors" of the world, such as Alexander the Great, and Napoleon ; or in modern times, of William the Second of Germany.

The Macedonian, beginning his life career in a little state in a little corner of the European continent, before he ended it, had produced effects that made themselves felt as far away as the Indus and the whole Punjab district of India, and affected powerfully the Kamma of all the peoples who lay between his own little native peninsula of Greece and that huge peninsula which juts out into the Indian Ocean.

Napoleon, too, born in a small island in the Mediterranean Sea, was such a very powerful personality that his Kamma overflowed all Europe, and produced the most profound changes in the Kamma of nearly every country in that continent, and of vast numbers of men living on that continent,—changes which were, some for good, and some for evil.

While, our modern example of one man's Kamma producing changes in other's Kamma, is the painful one of the exile of Doorn in Holland, once Emperor of all the Germans, and now a runaway refugee, glad of the hospitality of a little country he once in his pride thought was his at any time, for the taking. What profound changes this one man's Kamma, this single monarch's action, has produced in the Kamma of millions of men living and dead, there is hardly any need to speak. Indeed, it were better not to speak, so uniformly evil have many of these changes been. Yet, as already said, there is no such thing as unmixed good or unmixed evil in this world. And so, the "overflow Kamma" of such an one as was William the Second of Germany, has doubtless also led to many changes for good in the Kamma of many individuals in his native continent of Europe and his natal country of Germany: as, for instance, in the deliverance of the present generation of youthful Germans from the slavery of three year's subjection to the life of military barracks during the most impressionable period of their lives, and all that that implied of physical and moral degradation to their less fortunate fathers.

For this "overflow Kamma," may also be of the meritorious kind; it may be good Kamma, not bad. And such it is in the case of all powerful, good per-

sonalities. Of this we may take as first and greatest example, the Lord Buddha himself. How enormously rich and beneficent in its effect on his own continent and the world has been the “overflow Kamma” of this one individual! Countless millions of beings born in the lands of the East, in India and Burma, in China and Japan, in Ceylon and Siam, in the far-spreading plains of Mongolia, have had their Kamma completely changed for the good through the “overflow Kamma” of Gotama the Buddha. And that Kamma has not yet exhausted itself. It is still flowing on ; and in its flow fertilising the minds and enriching the hearts of many, even to-day in the spiritually dullard West who happily are open to receive its influence.

From the Buddha’s Arahans, the first missionaries whom he sent forth to propagate his religion, there also overflowed good Kamma which their simple presence among them brought to the peoples in the distant lands to which they made their way. In no other manner can we understand the speedy effect for good which was brought about among the wild, half-savage tribes of Mongolia, the brutal-living horsemen of the Asiatic steppes, by the arrival among them of the first missionaries of the Buddhist religion ; and the quick and fertilising influence which their arrival also had upon the thoughtful and culti-

vated literati of China and Korea, and ultimately upon Japan.

But coming down to lower levels than that of the Arahan, every good man confers a benefit upon the world simply by living in it. His good Kamma—some of it, at least,—overflows from him and benefits all about him. And also, unhappily, every evil man, simply by his living in it, does the world an injury. Thus, we are all of us, at all times, whether we think of it or not, benefactors or malefactors of the world, simply by our continuing to exist in it. The little thread of Kamma which we call “ours,” is thus not exclusively ours—how can it be, when, in ultimate truth and fact, there is no “us”?—but in its course through the fabric of our national, and our world-Kamma, imparts something of its colouring to its neighbour threads ; and if its colours are strong and full, even to many threads far removed from it in the fabric. As we have seen, one thread—that of a Buddha—may colour the threads of a whole continent, nay, of a whole world! We do not live, and cannot live, to ourselves, even if we want to. The many living threads of the so-called individual’s Kamma twine and intertwine with other threads, and change the course and colouring of these other threads for good or ill, according as our own particular thread is a good or an ill one.

Up to this point in our discussion, there is one word which has been left entirely unmentioned, and which, in the opinion of most Westerners, so they would say, ought to be mentioned, and that is *heredity*. Brought up, as most of them have been, in the mental atmosphere created by Darwin and Wallace and others around the subject of human characteristics, they will feel that an explanation of these characteristics which does not take into account, the inheritance of qualities by living creatures from their parents and more remote ancestors, is incomplete, and if it ignores this altogether, defective, nay, even more, false.

Well, the Kamma doctrine of the Buddha does not ignore heredity, the inheritance of characteristics from forebears in physical generation ; it only says that that inheritance does not apply to, and does not account for, the possession of *mental* characteristics, of the inner, most essential qualities of a man, that, in fact, which makes the man, apart from the shape of his nose, the cast of his hand, the colour of his hair, and so on. Physical heredity accounts for a man's physical characteristics, but that is all. It accounts for the physical qualities of a being, but not for his mind.

Any one can see that this is so. There is only one Shakespeare. There is no Shakespeare before the

one we know of, who transmits to that Shakespeare all those rich qualities of mind and heart which make him the author of plays that seem as if they will be remembered as long as our race remembers anything. Nor did that Shakespeare beget another Shakespeare who reproduced all that admirable, wonderful mental endowment which resulted in Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, Othello.

There has only been one Mozart. There was not another Mozart before him who gave him along with his blood, the power to conceive enchanting melody. Nor was there another Mozart after him, who inherited that power from him, and showed it forth to the world.

There is only one Newton. No other that the world has heard of, preceded him as the physical transmitter to him of the powers that made the man we call Newton, the daring voyager in strange seas of thought, alone.

But leaving these outstanding specimens of the race, coming to ordinary people like ourselves, can it be said of any of us that we are the continuations *in character* of our progenitors, of our fathers and mothers? These indeed have given us some of our physical characteristics, a brow, a nose, a chin, sometimes a gait in walking ; but our *character* is our own, and often—to the surprise and bewilderment, and

sometimes, the deep sorrow, of parents—altogether different from that of our father and mother. This is a fact of common experience. What is the explanation? Simply this which the Buddha gives: that the line of Kamma manifesting in a human being is a thing independent of the human physical heredity, and only makes use of this latter, so far as it may, for its own manifestation.

Suppose that some person deceases who, as his last dying thought, has one of craving for alcohol—a person, in fact, who has been a drunkard. That last dying thought of craving for alcohol by natural affinity seeks out and finds a fertilised human ovum of the same nature as itself. It seeks out and finds for its embodiment afresh in this visible world, a pair of parents full of the same craving, in short, a drunkard's heredity. Or suppose that some being deceases whose desires are of a superior nature, whose last dying thought is of goodness and truth and beauty: such a thought, by natural affinity, will seek out and find a human womb akin to its own nature, for its fresh embodiment in human life; and as a consequence there will be born a being with the *physical basis* required for the manifestation of his qualities of love of beauty, truth, and goodness. Furnished with that physical basis, he now proceeds, as he grows up, to manifest the qualities he possesses, which qualities his

physical parents did not possess in anything like the same measure, if at all, (as in the cases of Shakespeare, Mozart and Newton, for outstanding example), but only *the physical foundation* for the manifestation of such. In short, heredity does not account for men's character, but only provides the means for the manifestation of character, for its embodiment in physical form, its showing forth in our physical world.

Considered thus, if we wish to search for the heredity of the *character*, the inmost, essential qualities of a Shakespeare, or a Mozart, or a Newton (or, indeed, of any of us), we have to go much further back than to the two persons, male and female, who provided us with a body. In the case of these geniuses, we have to go right back in history and try to discover there some other character who showed forth the qualities of a Shakespeare, or a Mozart, or a Newton ; and when we have found any who resemble such, then we shall have at least a little foundation for saying: "Here is Shakespeare's progenitor," as we regard the person of one of the great dramatists of ancient Greece ; or "Here is Newton's true progenitor," as we consider one of the great scientist-philosophers of ancient days in that same wonderful little country. Between those distant days and our own, their particular stream of Kamma may many times have shown, many of its vari-coloured threads

in this our visible world, but only now, in the sixteenth century, in England, displayed again richly to physical eyes, that particular thread of dramatic, poetic power which made the man we call William Shakespeare. Similarly, between the days of ancient Greece and now, the cable of Kamma on which there once appeared in the light of this world, a great Grecian philosopher-scientist, may since have emerged into our physical world many times, showing at due intervals, many of its other coloured strands ; but only in this present age, in England, brought to the light that particular thread of acute intellectual power which made itself known, when provided with a physical body by suitable parents, as the genius Newton.

As to *how* Kamma seeks out and finds the body best suited to its next embodiment, this is something which we do not know. Yet, we may hazard the guess that it finds its path to its next goal as an aerial-electric charge finds its path to earth, namely, through the means that offers the best, readiest mode of release of tension. We do not, and minds like ours, *cannot*, know all the full details of Kamma and its working. This was one of the four things which the Buddha himself declared to be *acinteyya*, that is, not to be thought about too much. Such thought, such brooding, would be liable to bring on mental derange-

ment, he said. Only a Buddha is capable of fully understanding Kamma and all its methods of working.

"Then Kamma is as much a matter of faith as any god-believer's belief in his god!" some will say.

In a way it is, but with this very important difference, that the god-believer's belief is belief in a pure unknown quantity which, just because it is unknown, is invoked as the cause of anything about whose cause he is unable to find out anything ; thus, it is an unknown quantity pure and simple, an *x* sign, which may mean anything or nothing, when at last it is found out what it stands for. But Kamma, causation, is one of the fundamental laws of the actual visible world we know in our experience of every day. And the Kamma-doctrine of the Buddha is simply the extension of that every-day known and manifested law to the field of human character itself. It is simply the transference of the best known law of physics to the field of psychosis.

It is a fact that men are born with innate, inborn dispositions or characters which are not accounted for by heredity. How is that fact to be explained? How is the phenomenon of the emergence of such a complicated thing as a human character (a phenomenon which is occurring every second somewhere or other upon the surface of the inhabited globe) to be accounted for? It must have a cause, like every

other phenomenon. To say that a god has produced it, is no answer at all in this case, any more than it is in any other. The savage in the African forest will also tell you, which he cannot otherwise explain, with the—to him—perfectly sufficient answer, that his Ju-ju did it. But this is not a perfectly sufficient answer to anybody but himself, that is, to anybody who has got beyond the stage of the savage in mentality.

So it is here. We reason from the known to the unknown. We know that cause and effect prevail in the physical world. It is therefore only a fair presumption that they also equally prevail in the psychical world. Most certainly that extraordinarily complicated phenomenon, a human character, cannot just spring up out of nowhere in particular, every time a human ovum is fertilised and in due course issues upon the world a new human being. The onus of proof that such a monstrosity occurs lies upon those who maintain it. It does not lie upon others to prove that it is not so ; for it is the universal law of the world that all phenomena have their due and appropriate cause in an antecedent condition without which they cannot come about. But, as already said, the character of the human parents or the nature of the upbringing or the environment by which the new being is surrounded, do not account for its character, which is always itself, and sometimes so in complete *defiance*

of all these factors. Hence the believer in the doctrine of Kamma holds that belief as one firmly based on reason, that is, upon inference from facts already known with certainty in the fields where he possesses full means of ascertaining facts and their connections.

It was said above that Kamma finds its way to the womb that will provide it with most accurate expression just as lightning reaches the earth by the path that offers it easiest access thither. That is so. Drunkard in last life goes to drunken womb : refined nature to womb that favours the continuance of such a nature ; and so on. But what if the nature is so refined, so super-earthly in its characteristics that no human womb can provide it with the encasement or embodiment appropriate to its refined, super-earthly quality? In that case, of necessity, it finds that embodiment it requires in some sphere higher than earth, in one or other of the "worlds of the gods," as Orientals call them, or "heavens," as Occidentals name them. But suppose the Kamma is of a very low, gross, degraded sort, so low, so gross, so degraded, that no earthly womb can possibly supply it with appropriate embodiment, then it will necessarily have to seek, and will find, that appropriate embodiment in a world lower and more gross than our physical world, a world of suffering greater than ours is, in short, it will find its appropriate embodiment in one of the hell-worlds.

Yet another possible embodiment remains to the Kamma according to its nature. Suppose it is not so degraded as to be able to find its only appropriate embodiment in a hell-world, but yet is so gross in some ways, say, in the way of gluttony, that no human womb can provide it with an appropriate expression of that gross vice, then the unpleasant possibility lies open of its taking its next embodiment in the form of an animal of gluttonous character, say a pig. Or if the character of the deceased person has been of such a very fierce, ferociously cruel nature that no human womb can give it adequate expression through a human body, then it is an animal body which will have to provide that expression, an animal of some of the more ferocious beasts of prey. In the opinion of the present writer it is not a very likely thing that any human being among the civilised races of to-day could be of so swinish or so tigerish a disposition that only a pig's or a tiger's body could appropriately give expression to their swinish or tigerish disposition ; nevertheless, it remains an unpleasant *possibility*.

“Only an unpleasant possibility!” some readers may say. “Why, it's a perfectly *horrible* idea, that a man should be born a pig. I never want to believe anything so disgusting as that ; and I don't know how you Buddhists manage to do it.” Well, we Buddhists

don't believe that a man is born a pig. What we believe is that piggish Kamma takes shape, and must take shape, in piggish form. But when that piggish Kamma which has been given temporary expression in ~~corresponding~~ form, is worked out, then some section of the heap of accumulated Kamma which lies behind nearly every living being, will now come into effect, and the next birth in that line of Kamma will be, most likely, a human birth.

For no states are eternal—as, how can they be?—in a universe whose very nature is of the essence of change, of mutation. It is a horrible idea that any being should be subject through all eternity to unending torment in a hell-world ; and Buddhists have difficulty in understanding how any reasonable, decently feeling person can calmly contemplate the possibility of such a thing, let alone actually believe that such a thing is so. To our logical, Buddhist understanding of things, it is a completely false idea. Hells cannot be eternal any more than any other state in a flowing universe. They must come to an end, as does everything else, at some period or another ; and the sufferers therein obtain release from their torment when they have worked out the Kamma which took them there. And similarly with the descent to that variety of hell-world, the animal kingdom, with its constant, never-ceasing exposure to all sorts of

alarms and apprehensions and cruel deaths. The state of the being who unhappily falls thither is not an eternal one ; it has its end, that unhappy kind of life, and it may be, and often is, a very speedy end. And then the being is born again in a happier form, in a human one, 'as the result of penultimate Kamma coming into effect ; and he again has the opportunity, as result of that human birth, to make good Kamma for the future which may prevent him from ever again falling into the hell-world of the animal kingdom.

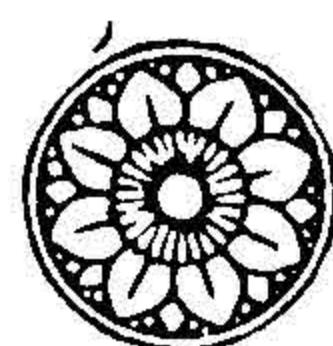
There remains yet another Kamma-possibility, this time the best possibility of all. It may happen that all the Kamma, both good and bad, of a certain given stream of Kamma is completely cleared off, except a very small portion, which portion it is that keeps the individual still alive and active in our world. Now, by the performance of powerful Kamma of the good sort, the individual wipes out the last remnant of the bad Kamma he may have behind him. All his Kamma-accounts are squared ; there is no more left unsettled of either sort. He is what is called an Arahan, and when his present body expires, there being no more Kamma remaining, there can be no further embodiment of Kamma ; in other words, there is no more re-birth. There remains only Nibbana, more accurately, Pari-Nibbana. For Nibbana, the complete extinction of self-referring activity of any

kind, can and does take place, even in his present embodiment, in one who has striven successfully to bring all self-ideas, all Atta-notions, to an end ; and so he has Nibbana, even in this present body.

But most of us ordinary folk are a long way from that high consummation of all efforts on' the path of the noble. Our present task is to make all the good Kamma we possibly can as a counterbalance, as far as may be, to what bad Kamma we may have made in the past, and unhappily, may quite possibly still make in the future. This we have to do, here and now in this earth-life of ours, since there is nowhere else to do it in. This and this alone, our good deeds, will stand by us as our saviour and supporter in any future state we may encounter. For it is no mere sententious saying but a solemn truth, that our Kamma, our action, is our father and our mother, the family, the race, to which we belong ; that we have no other friend, no other refuge, but our good deeds. These, and only these, can be depended on to go before us and receive us with kind welcome in whatever future lies ahead of us, as friends and relatives greet the wanderer who returns from a far journey.

A strong sense of self-responsibility is thus the keynote of the character of every man who has understood even a little the Kamma doctrine propounded by the Buddha. For such an one knows that at every

moment, by what he thinks, or says, or does, he is adding to the stock of the good or the evil, that is, of the happiness, or the unhappiness of himself, and so, of the world of which himself is a part. He knows that in the last resort he has no friend but himself, but his own good deed ; and no enemy but himself, but his own evil deed. And so knowing, he abases himself before no god for its favours, fears no devil for its malice, but puts his whole trust in his own right endeavour, strengthened and encouraged in that endeavour by the knowledge that in the twenty-five hundred years that have passed since first it was taught by the Buddha, all who have practised it right on to its culmination in Arahan-ship, have found it lead to the final ending of Kamma, to the *summum bonum*, the Good Supreme, Nibbana.





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